CONFERENCE connection
Alabama · Georgia
Mississippi · South Carolina · Tennessee · NW Florida
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

May 15, 2020

It's OK... But

by Rev. Char Burch, Transitional Conference Minister

"It's okay!" Are you tired? It's okay! Are you depressed, exhausted, angry? It's okay! Many of us are experiencing various feelings these days as things seem to drag-on. In addition to those already mentioned, I have heard people talk about feeling sad, depressed, confused, displaced, fearful, grateful, overwhelmed, hopeful, unsure, distrustful, anxious. amazed, helpless, guilty, weary. Do any of these resonate with you? You might be able to add some others. And of course, there are those combinations of several feelings at once. It's okay to have the feelings! It is a human response to a challenging situation.

This Sunday is Mental Health Sunday in the UCC which seems to have a different twist this year. We are all more aware of the challenge of maintaining good mental health, but hopefully more sensitive to those who cope with its difficulties.

For many of us who are facing the various feelings above, we can stay mentally healthy by acknowledging the feelings and then making some changes to restore our well-being. Things like getting outside if possible, exercise, reading novels, meditating, baking, listening to music, avoiding the news, making lists of things for which we are grateful, writing letters, connecting with family/friends, finding personal space, and spending time in conversation with God, etc.

But sometimes, the feelings can overwhelm us to the point that we cannot

function well. When that happens, we need to contact those who are mental health professionals who can provide professional advice!

Feelings are okay! But one concern about feelings is that they are not a good basis for making complicated decisions. Feelings come from one part of our brains. But when we need to make decisions (other than things like responding to danger), we want to use what my mother always called the "thinking cap." This part of the brain allows more information to be considered in making complex decisions – like re-opening churches.

Therefore, as important decisions are made – whether about re-opening churches, assessing church finances or other personal issues, it is important not to base decisions on feelings, but to obtain information – facts, implications of actions, options, etc. Then good decisions can be made. The value of working with Committees or groups is the ability to help each other not be over-reactive but make informed decisions.

Meanwhile, we need to show each other a little kindness and graciousness as we experience and move through these strange times. I continue to be amazed at the creativity and resilience of our clergy and churches. The God's Spirit is very much alive! You all continue in my prayers!

Blessings, Char

News from the Conference Office

Special Event: Conference Unity Worship

Save the Dates for a special Conference-wide worship event on **Saturday, June 20, 2020** at 11:00 am Eastern / 10:00 am Central.

The Southeast Conference's Annual Meeting has been postponed, but on June 20th we will still gather online for a **Conference Unity Worship Event: Being the Church in a Pandemic World**. There will be opportunities to hear from one another both through word and song as we share how we are *being* the Church in our communities during these difficult times. Details to on how to join will be in the next Conference Connection. Hope to see you there!

Southeast Conference 2020 Annual Meeting

Our June Annual Meeting has been rescheduled for **Saturday, September 26th** from 10:30 am Eastern /9:30 am Central. It will be a shorter meeting this year. although we hope to can gather in person. We will not be gathering in one location, but will have multiple locations throughout the conference, all connected through Zoom. If it is not safe to meet in person, we will still meet on September 26 by Zoom and phone only. We hope you can join us!

From the Generosity Coordinator

by Min. Carrole Moss, Generosity Coordinator

My prayer is that you are well, staying in, staying safe, and staying healthy. It is so important that we continue to feed our minds, body, and spirit at such a time as this. We are living in a time of change. Most of us would agree that humanity and the planet Earth are evolving at a quickened pace, therefore it is natural for people to react with fear because these changes will bring some level of difficulty and loss to many of us. As we find ways to serve, our fears dissipate. We can serve best by remaining calm with

our friends and families even when the situation seems dark. We can serve by going out into the world and help to rebuild lives, by showing more love and compassion to those in need.

As we speak of things ESSENTIAL, the essential element is LOVE.

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our thoughts that we find ourselves going round and round in circles, finding it difficult to concentrate because we are so distracted, not really accomplishing much. This can be a signal that we should slow down and relax. Giving ourselves respite from our daily concerns is like giving gifts to ourselves. We lessen the weight of our troubles and become more receptive the wisdom and answers that the universe has to offer us.

Psalm 46 reads: God is our Refuge and our Strength (mighty and impenetrable to temptation), a very present and well-proved help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains be shaken into the midst of the seas. Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling and tumult. Selah. There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her right early (at the dawn of the morning). The nations raged, the kingdoms tottered and were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge (our Fortress and High Tower). Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has wrought desolations and wonders in the earth. He makes war to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow into pieces and snaps the spear into two; He burns the chariots in the fire. **LET BE AND BE STILL,** and know (recognize and understand) that I AM GOD. I will be exalted among the nations! I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of host is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge. Selah (pause and calmly think of that)!

The word of God reminds us of who God is and calls us to worship God. This word also reminds us to not get weary in well doing. Please stay safe and follow the recommendations of the CDC. **WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!!!**

A huge note of thanks to all of you for all the ways that you continue to support this conference. We are grateful.

Looking forward to worshipping with all of you again, real soon. Blessings as we continue on this journey, together,

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Special Opportunity for Generosity

Economic Impact Payment checks have been received or are in the mail. If you receive one and are among the fortunate who still have a job and/or income, consider sharing some or all of it with your local congregation, the Southeast Conference, the wider church, or a special ministry that is responding to needs created by the circumstances of COVID-19. We are reminded how the early church shared possessions for the common good of all.

Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2020. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of May 17

- Circular Congregational UCC; Charleston, South Carolina
- George Bennett
- Matt Frierdich
- James Norris
- J. Richard Woodward
- Kathi Martin

Week of May 24

- First Congregational Christian UCC; Montgomery Alabama
- Clara Benson

- Diane Tugel
- Stephanie Crumpton
- Patricia Shropshire

Week of May 31

- Real Inspiration Ministries; Decatur, Georgia
- Christy Bonner
- Andrew Frierson Jr
- Glenna Shepherd
- Dorothy Gager

Churches in Transition

Central Congregational, Atlanta, GA; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Open Table, Mobile AL; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA

COVID-19 Special Section

Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders

As states begin opening-up some businesses, the question arises – what

about our local churches? What about in-person worship? When does that happen? This conversation has been happening among clergy, but we would like to invite Moderators and all Church Leaders into the conversation.

Join us on **Monday, May 18 at 7 pm Eastern/6 pm Central** via Zoom. Register online here. Meanwhile, **click here** for a document that presents suggested phases for re-opening churches based on the decline of COVID-19 cases in your area.

The Pandemic and Mental Health: Zoom Recording

If you missed our very informative recent Zoom conversation Rev with Sarah Lund, Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice, you can view the recording here.

Music Resources

Looking for possible music resources for worship? The UCC website includes a list of links to music videos by UCC musicians to music they hold the copyright to, and so can give churches permission to use. They are solo videos at the moment, but things are being updated as requests are being made for more musicians to contribute. The list can be accessed from the Worship, Music & Copyright document available here. The file is entitled Recorded Music We Have Permission to Use. The links and copyright info

are included with each piece. There is no charge for UCC congregations.

News from the Wider Church

Nominations for UCC Positions

The UCC Nominating Committee is seeking nominations for the positions of General Synod Moderator and Assistant Moderator for General Synod 34 in 2023, as well as individuals to serve six-year terms as Members At-large to the United Church of Christ Board of Directors, Class of 2027. Click here for more information.

Mental Health Awareness Sunday is May 17

This is a perfect time to highlight the importance of Mental Health that affects everyone. The UCC has resources of the website at www.ucc.org/mental_health_sunday_2017.

The UCC Strengthen the Church Offering

We are amid a crisis that is demanding that we remain physically distant at

a time when so many need the love and hope of a strong church to walk with them through an extraordinary global emergency. As many of us now present our ministry online, we pray that our love is being felt across technology, reaching those who need us most. Being church in new ways has demanded much of us as we have faced this challenging time together.

This special offering supports the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations. The world of the church is changing as we seek to reach out in different ways. Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill on its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities. Pentecost Sunday, May 31, is the recommended day for the offering.

Prayers from International Day of Prayer

On the National Day of Prayer (May 7), the United Church of Christ released 46 original prayers written by people of many faiths, in a multitude of voices. Religious scholars, deployed military, social activists, educators, authors, poets, a politician, and a migrant living in sanctuary have authored appeals that touch on the need for the Divine in this time of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The church's interfaith "prayer warriors" range in age from a 95-year-old former UCC officer to a 7-year-old child. This was part of the International Day of Prayer. These powerful prayers can be read at https://www.ucc.org/idop.

Join the Poor People's Campaign Digital Mobilization

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. launched a Poor People's Campaign believing that people joining together could create, "a new and unsettling force in our complacent nation." Over the last two years, UCC members and congregations have been participating in the continuation of this work through the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival by national and state direct actions, education and organizing. The campaign

has united tens of thousands of people across the country to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy and ecological devastation while centering the voices and experiences of poor, low-wealth, and vulnerable communities. Click here to learn more and to register.

Thursdays for the Soul

Thursdays for the Soul is a series of UCC webinars offered 3:30 -4:30 pm Eastern. The upcoming one on May 21, 2020 is entitled: Cultivating Resilience after Collective Trauma. To register or see future webinars go to https://www.ucc.org/calendar

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Energy Democracy Zoom Meeting is June 23

COVID has highlighted a huge disparity of environmental and economic justice in the South. Congregations are suffering because of the inability to gather for worship service however utilities are still requiring pay for their service. Those in our congregations are not able to provide goods and service for their living yet utilities are requiring pay for their service for you to live. This is inequitable and egregious. We are limited in our choices for energy sources; pay disproportionate energy rates; and, are dying from the pollution. We as people of faith are called to fight for a just society. We want to invite you to envision a ministry where we had more resources for ministry because our congregation has control of their own energy. We invite you to demand that our leadership places people and planet over profit. We invite you to fight for the least of these. Mark your calendar now and plan to join Rev. Michael Malcom.

News from our Local Congregations

Rev. Andrew Young Preaching at First Church Atlanta

The Reverend Andrew Young will be preaching via Livestream this Sunday, May 17th at First Congregational Church at 11:00 am EDT. In addition to being an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, Young served as a U.S. Congressman from Georgia, United States Ambassador to the United Nations in the Carter Administration, 55th Mayor of Atlanta, co-chair of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, and President of the National Council of Churches. Since leaving office he has founded or served in many organizations working on issues of public policy and political lobbying. Watch here: http://firstchurchatl.org/sunday-service/.

What is YOUR Congregation Doing?

Even though we are not meeting in-person for worship at our churches, local church ministry doesn't stop during a pandemic. In fact, there is most likely the need for *more* connection with others. Let us know what you are doing in your local setting by sending us an email. Share a short paragraph or two and a photo or two. We'd love to share with the rest of the Conference.

Training and Learning Opportunities

Death, Dying and Grief in Isolation Webinar

During this unprecedented time, PATHWAYS is excited to announce a Zoom webinar opportunity: **Death, Dying and Grief in Isolation: A Conversation about Ministry in Changing Times.** The ;host will be Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, Associate General Minister of the UCC. She will lead a conversation about ministry in changing times. The event will be on Tuesday, May 26, 2020 at 8:00 PM (EDT), 7:00 PM (CDT). Click here to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

2021 UCC Southern Region Women's Retreat

Mark your calendars for October 15-17, 2021 for the 2021 UCC Southern Region Women's Retreat, hosted by the Florida UCC Women at Cerveny Conference Center, 11057 Camp Weed Place, Live Oak, FL 32060. Stay tuned for more information.

Social Distancing Webinar Offered by Peace Center

How can the church respond with compassion and understanding to those suffering from the “radical loneness” that can result from social distancing? Find out by joining the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center on Thursday, May 14 or Wednesday, May 27 for a timely webinar entitled ***Social Distancing, Not Social Isolation: A Family Systems Perspective***. Registration for both sessions is now open!

Social Distancing, Not Social Isolation is a 90-minute webinar that will show church leaders how they can help people overcome the potential loneliness of social distancing, and also reflect on how this time of “sheltering in place” can be used to facilitate life-giving connections with others. This webinar integrates Bowen family systems theory with the research of John Cacioppo, social neuroscientist.

This webinar will be presented via Zoom on both May 14 and May 27 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The fee is $30. To register or to learn more, including our cancellation policy, please visit https://www.brownpapertickets.com/producer/720852. A link to this webinar will be sent to you upon registration, and you can attend on your computer, iPad, or Smartphone device.

Conference Calendar

"Opening Back Up" Online Conversation
May 18 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT (Register for the Zoom call)

Clergy Conversations via Zoom
Tuesday, May 19 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/479440102)

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers
Thursday, May 21 at 1:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/96976838422)

Commission on Ministry Meeting
Thursday, May 21 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT

Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers
Tuesday, May 26 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT (https://zoom.us/j/354744689)

Clergy Conversations via Zoom
Tuesday, May 26 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/479440102)

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers
Thursday, May 28 at 1:00 pm EDT (https://zoom.us/j/96976838422)

View the **full calendar** of events online: https://www.secucc.org/events/

Contact Us

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